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Conflict Mitigation Program: Promoting Peace through Improved Governance and Incomes in Targeted Areas

Nepal's nine-year-old Maoist insurgency has had a profound negative impact on social, political and economic development. The insurgency found fertile ground in rural areas, where poor governance and the dominance of local elites bred poverty, injustice and exclusion. The Maoist's initial pro-people agenda appealed to the disenfranchised, but Maoist tactics have since degraded into a campaign of violence, lawlessness, intimidation, and destruction. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of nearly 11,000 people. Beyond the human toll, the conflict has severely disrupted the national economy; the U.S. Embassy estimates losses to national property and the economy at more than \$1.5 billion. The Special Objective program was created to respond directly to the insurgency.

What does USAID do to support the Government of Nepal in promoting peace?

USAID has an agreement with His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) for a \$30 million bilateral program (2002-2006) that aims to promote peace and mitigate the negative effects of the conflict through the provision of quick and visible benefits to under-served and conflict-affected populations and support for peace processes.

Employment Generation and Rural Infrastructure: Inadequate infrastructure and employment opportunities are chief grievances expressed by rural Nepalese, and have contributed to the spread of the conflict. This program aims to generate over 1.5 million person-days of temporary employment, by paying rural poor in conflict-affected areas to construct and medium to small infrastructure projects, such as secondary roads, footpaths, footbridges, trails, small gravity-fed irrigation and drinking water supply systems, landslide and erosion control works and buildings (e.g., rural schools and health facilities). Local communities identify, plan and implement infrastructure activities. This promotes transparency and enhances citizens' confidence in democratic governance. Sustainable income generation activities, including support for adult literacy, skills training and micro-credit, are carried out in areas close to the infrastructure projects to capitalize on the resulting increased agricultural productivity (in the case of irrigation systems) and market access (in the case of roads).

Expanded Support for Victims of the Conflict: Nepal has expressed a commitment to eliminate torture in its Constitution, its ratification of international conventions and the establishment of a national Human Rights Commission. However, reports of torture by both the Maoists and Security Forces have increased in recent years. This has negative economic, social and psychological consequences. USAID supports activities to rehabilitate torture survivors and provide comprehensive medical and psychosocial care for them and their families. Medical and legal professionals are being trained in torture-related issues, in order to support legal action by torture victims and document human rights abuses. Activities to assist vulnerable populations, including indigent people widowed, orphaned or displaced by the conflict, are also being supported.

Increased National Capacity to Transition to Peace: HMGN's policy formulation process lacks sufficient linkages to civil society and coordination between Ministries. Weaknesses in management and organizational culture impede the development and effective implementation of a comprehensive strategic approach to resolving conflict. Civil society organizations are unable to effectively sway national policy; many are still nascent, and political party linkages and personal interest often influence how the organizations themselves articulate their special and collective interests. This program emphasizes the strengthening of HMGN's strategic planning and policy formulation, implementation and monitoring related to conflict mitigation and the eventual return to peace. Members of HMGN will be given technical assistance and training to design and

implement peace and development initiatives. Civil society networks that contribute to peace-building and conflict mitigation will be supported in an effort to strengthen their efficacy and promote the participation of women, *dalits*, and under-represented ethnic groups in a national dialogue for peace.

Strengthened Community Capacity for Peace: The stress of prolonged conflict has shaken bonds of trust, eroding the early and very promising successes of decentralization in rural communities. This program supports initiatives that promote cohesiveness and healing, by uniting people around activities that benefit the community. Activities include teaching community survival skills, such as local dispute resolution and negotiation; and support for community development projects. All activities will actively promote the inclusion of the disenfranchised in community decision-making processes.

What are the results?

- In 2004, more than 322,000 person-days of paid employment were generated. Labor-intensive green road, irrigation and water supply activities carried out in eleven districts in the West, Mid-West and Far West of Nepal provided income and access to important infrastructure services to thousands of rural Nepalese.
- Over 3,102 torture survivors have benefitted from medical, legal, and psychosocial support services since the program commenced in mid-2002.
- A shelter-based treatment center for female torture/trauma survivors has already provided rehabilitation services to over 220 women since it opened in late 2002.
- 43 victims have received legal aid services. Six cases have been prosecuted successfully to date – one of whom have received compensation, the remaining have not. 28 cases are pending. The remaining nine have been dismissed or failed
- One hundred and seventy nine medical professionals have been trained to examine, document, diagnose and treat torture survivors without re-traumatizing them. The documentation is to a standard acceptable in a court of law.
- Community mediation services have been highly sought: since January 2004, 939 out of 1,156 applications for community mediation have been resolved successfully. Over 1,330 community mediators and 62 master trainers have been trained.

Who are the key partners?

USAID partners and collaborates with the HMGN Ministry of Finance in association with several support ministries, government departments and donors. Donor partners include the British Development Agency, German Development Agency, European Commission and United Nations organizations. USAID also works with various international and national implementing partners.

For more information:

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